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# Have Civilising Processes Changed Direction? Informalisation, Functional Democratisation, and Globalisation

Cas Wouters\*

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**Abstract:** »Hat sich die Richtung von Zivilisationsprozessen geändert? Informalisierung, Funktionale Demokratisierung, und Globalisierung«. With his concept "functional democratisation," Norbert Elias articulates how a specific type of "social equalisation" is connected to expanding interdependency networks and long-term civilising processes. This article initially focuses on connections between functional democratisation and informalisation, throwing new light on the wider framework of the theory of civilisation and informalisation, as well as on these processes themselves. These insights are followed by a discussion into how functional democratisation and informalisation are interconnected with social differentiation and integration as the two major process drivers of globalisation, thus illuminating directions of processes of civilisation, informalisation, and functional democratisation within the overall process of globalisation. Special attention goes to trends of differentiation and integration on the one hand, and integration conflicts or disintegration and defunctionalisation on the other. Considering from a global perspective which side of these opposing trends is dominant helps to clarify directions in processes of (in-)formalisation and of (de-)civilisation. In addition, it helps to explain the declining power and status of the West as a global establishment, and changes in the balance of power between national and international political and economic centres. Expanding global interdependencies have given rise to a variety of practical problems and theoretical questions – a major policy question among them: "How to steer clear of financial and/or political turbulence?" Issues such as economic crises, global migration, and populism, brought up major theoretical questions: "Have the driving processes of differentiation, integration, and increasing complexity of social functions stalled, changed direction, or ceased altogether?" In other words, "Have civilising processes changed direction?," an issue that was first raised in the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. Today, as strong spurts of globalisation give rise to feelings of loss and decline, it is reappraised once again in this paper.

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**Keywords:** Social differentiation and integration, integration conflicts, defunctionalisation, competition and interweaving mechanism, Elias's civilizing theory.

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## 1. Two Phases in Civilising Processes: Formalisation and Informalisation

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The concept of informalisation was intended as a better alternative to “permissiveness.” Whereas both in fact refer to the same social changes of the 1960s and 1970s, “permissiveness” emphasises only the “relaxation” in standards of behaviour. As such, these changes were welcomed by many as an increase in “liberty,” while others saw them as a decline in moral standards. The concept of informalisation provides a synthesis beyond this moral opposition. It acknowledges the increase of options and varieties, but does not interpret this increase as a “relaxation” of the self-steering capacity of individuals. On the contrary, living up to the demands of the relaxed standards of behaviour is not easier, but more difficult. It involves a rise in demands on self-steering capacity, not a decline.

In the midst of the Expressive Revolution, Norbert Elias's theory of civilising processes gave rise to the question “Has the civilising process changed direction?” Lively debates at the time formed the cradle of my theory of informalisation, founded on the insight that more lenient and varied codes of manners implied rising demands on steering capacities, the latter a continuation of civilising processes, the former a change of its direction. Accordingly, two long-term phases were discerned: first, a formalising phase in which steering codes expanded, gained rigidity, and became more demanding, subjecting more and more aspects of behaviour to increasingly strict and detailed social regulations such as traditions, customs, habits, manners, and laws. Then, in the second half of the 19th century, as social codes lost rigidity and gained plasticity – changing rather fixed socially learned codes in the direction of flexible guidelines – formalisation lost its dominance to informalisation. This ongoing process of social codes changing towards greater leniency and variety once again increased demands on self-steering amid expanding possibilities and options to adjust more in a flexible way to changing conditions of life. Simultaneously, this process compelled psychic processes to be more versatile and more firmly dominated by consciousness. From a global perspective, we all live in a period of transition between two long-term phases of civilising processes, from formalisation to informalisation.

Informalisation and what Norbert Elias described as “functional democratisation” intertwine with each other as “diminishing contrasts” and “increasing varieties,” two key concepts in Elias's synopsis of his theory of civilising processes. Each of these four concepts – informalisation, functional democratisation, diminishing contrasts, and increasing varieties – refer to processes that,

seen from a higher theoretical level, are side effects of differentiation and integration processes (Wouters 2016). The next section presents a preliminary exploration of these connections.

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## 2. Functional Democratisation or "Diminishing Contrasts" and Informalisation or "Increasing Varieties" as Side Effects of Differentiation and Integration Processes

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In presenting the concept of "functional democratisation," Elias closely connects it to long-term processes of social differentiation and integration of social functions in which all groups and individuals have become increasingly interdependent, coinciding with the reduction in power potentials between groups and a "diminishing of contrasts" in their conduct. The latter is a specific process of social equalisation via "civilisation," through the "regularity of functional differentiation" within the West, as well as in the colonisation of land outside of it:

[W]hat is taking place before our eyes, what we generally call the 'spread of civilisation' in the narrower sense – that is, the spread of our institutions and standards of conduct beyond the West<sup>1</sup> – constitutes, as we have said, the last wave so far within a movement that first took place over several centuries within the West, and whose trend and characteristic patterns, including science, technology, and other manifestations of a specific type of self-restraint, established themselves here long before the concept of 'civilisation' existed. From Western society – as a kind of upper class – Western 'civilised' patterns of conduct are today spreading over wide areas outside the West, whether through the settlement of Occidentals or through the assimilation of the upper strata of other nations, just as the models of conduct earlier spread within the West itself from this or that upper stratum, from certain courtly or commercial centres. (Elias 2012a [1939], 424)

I will interrupt this lengthy quotation to elaborate on 1) the meaning of the "upper-class function of Western nations as a whole" (ibid., 425), and 2) the importance of global changes in the balance of power between political and commercial centres for understanding more recent waves in the spread of Western institutions and patterns of conduct.

1) Elias connects the rise of what he describes as the upper-class function of Western nations as a whole to the spread of court society (see also Elias 2006) [1969]. "In one form or another," he writes,

the models of conduct of court-aristocratic *bonne compagnie* have penetrated industrial society at large – even were the courts were less rich, powerful and influential. The conduct of the ruling Western groups, the degree and kind of

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<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, this spread was at the same time a spread of colonisation.

their affect-control, show a high degree of uniformity despite all national variations; this is certainly, in general terms, a result of the closely knit and long-ranging chains of interdependence linking the various national societies of the West. [...] This court society exercised for the first time, and in a particularly pure form, a function that was afterwards transmitted in different degrees and with various modifications to broader and broader strata of Western society: the function of a 'good society', an upper class under pressure from many sides, from the organized monopolies of taxation and physical force on the one hand, and from the rising middle and lower classes on the other. Court society was indeed the first representative of the particular form of upper class that emerged more clearly as, with the advancing division of functions, the different social classes became more closely interdependent, and as the number of people and the geographical areas that were placed in such interdependence grew larger. It was a highly constricted upper class, whose situation demanded constant self-restraint and intensive drive-control. Precisely this form of upper class from now on predominated in Western countries. And the models of this self-restraint, first developed in court-aristocratic society for the sphere of sociability, were passed on from class to class, adjusted or modified, like the upper class function itself. (2012a, 469-70)

2) Changes in the upper class function itself as well as in the balance of power between political and commercial centres is the second reason for interrupting Elias at this point where he refers to "courtly and commercial centres," because later in this article I will focus on these centres and on changes in the balance of power between them. These changes are a long-term continuation of the processes in which warlords and then courtiers became increasingly dependent upon people in the world of finance, industry, and commerce. During the era of colonisation, the expansion of "functional differentiation" in the West to areas outside of it proceeded from both centres, but in comparison to commercial ones, the powers emanating from western political centres clearly remained dominant until the era of decolonisation. Without a powerful army and navy, the competition for land to colonise could not be successful, and the manufacture and transportation of colonial products also needed to be protected by guns and gunboats (cf. Linklater 2016a). Near the end of the process of decolonisation and early into the postcolonial era, the balance of power between the political and the commercial centres shifted in favour of the latter, particularly in areas where decolonisation combined considerably with pacification.

Since the end of the 1970s, the process accelerated when a deregulation of capital markets coincided with the transportation of whole industries from the West to cheap-labour countries such as India and China. The dominance in the competition for land shifted to a competition for money, and in this process, the dominance of the powers of "land lords" (aristocrats) diminished in relation to the powers of "money lords" ("moneycrats"), while the interdependence of both "lords" became interwoven.

Below I will provide an explanatory sketch of this interweaving as well as the shifting dominance in the balance of power, particularly since the 1980s.

For now, back to the quotation elaborating the spread of Western “civilized” patterns of conduct over wide areas outside the West. Elias continues by hammering out the point he is building up to, that functional differentiation, functional democratisation, and “the spread of our institutions and standards of conduct beyond the West” cannot be understood through reductionism:

It is not ‘technology’ which is *the* cause of this change of behaviour, what we call ‘technology’ is only *one* of its symbols, one of the last manifestations of that constant foresight imposed by the formation of longer and longer chains of actions and the competition between those bound together by them. Civilised forms of conduct spread to these other areas because, and to the extent that, through their incorporation into the tangle of interdependences whose centre the West still constitutes, the structure of their societies and of human relationships in general is likewise changing within them. Technology, education – all are facets of the same overall development. In the areas into which the West has expanded, the social functions with which the individual must comply are increasingly changing in such a way as to induce the same constant foresight and affect-control as in the West itself. Here, too, the transformation of the whole social existence is the basic condition of the civilisation of conduct. For this reason we find in the relation of the West to other parts of the world the beginnings of the reduction in contrasts which is peculiar to every major wave of the civilising movement. (Elias 2012a [1939], 424)

The whole section from which this is quoted can be read as an example of “functional democratisation,” although the section was written in the 1930s and Elias did not introduce this concept before 1970. This section, entitled “diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties,” is the third of eight sections that make up Part Four of *On the Process of Civilisation* (2012a, 401-90), in which Elias presents his *Overview: Towards a Theory of Civilising Processes*. In section 3 (422-7), he connects (1) the “mechanism of competition and monopoly” with the (2) “regularity of functional differentiation” and predicts (3) declining differences in power and conduct, and thus, as I will clarify later, he in fact specifies three significant and interconnected process drivers of informalisation: the rise to critical levels of (1) competition and co-operation, (2) social differentiation and integration of social functions, and (3) functional democratisation in expanding networks of interdependency. Elias continues:

Western people, under the pressure of their own competitive struggle, [...] are making large parts of the world dependent on them and at the same time – in keeping with a regularity of functional differentiation that has been observed over and again – are themselves becoming dependent on these parts. [...] Largely without deliberate intent, they work in a direction which sooner or later leads to a reduction in the differences both of social power and of conduct between colonists and colonised. (ibid., 425)

Thus, Elias recognises the social inequalities that were generated by colonisation and almost in the same breath predicts their decline via functional democratisation. In this way, he builds up the following summary: “*The contrasts in conduct between the [currently] upper and lower groups are reduced with the*

*spread of civilisation; the varieties or nuances of civilised conduct are increased*” (ibid., 426; italics in original).

Elias explains what he means by “increasing varieties” not before section 6 on “Shame and repugnance” (ibid., 457-63):

[W]ith the advancing division of functions and the greater integration of people, the major contrasts between different classes and countries diminished, while the nuances, the varieties of their moulding within the framework of civilization, multiplied. [...] The more are the strong contrasts of individual conduct tempered, the more are the violent fluctuations of pleasure or displeasure contained, moderated and changed by self-control, the greater becomes the sensitivity to shades or nuances of conduct, the more finely tuned people grow to minute gestures and forms, and the more complex becomes their experience of themselves and their world at levels that were previously hidden from consciousness through the veil of strong affects. [...] In the wake of this pacification, the sensitivity of people to social conduct also changed. Now, inner fears – the fears of one sector of the personality for another – grew in proportion to the decrease of outer ones. As a result of these inner tensions, people began to experience each other in a more differentiated way which was precluded as long as they constantly faced serious and inescapable threats from outside. Now a major part of the tensions which were earlier discharged directly in conflicts between people, had to be resolved as an inner tension in the struggle of the individual with himself. (ibid., 460-1)

As I mentioned in my 1976 (Dutch) article “Has the civilising process changed direction?,” many, if not all, examples and developments brought together under the conceptual umbrella of “informalisation” can be interpreted and explained as a continuation of “increasing varieties.” Apparently, the processes of informalisation and functional democratisation are directly connected, rooted as they are in the same transformation of a whole social existence. They relate to each other as processes of formalisation and informalisation and as “diminishing contrasts” and “increasing varieties” within the same movement of the civilising process:

It was at small functional centres that the foresight, more complex self-discipline, more stable superego formation enforced by growing interdependence, first became noticeable. Then more and more functional centres within the West itself changed in the same direction. Finally, in conjunction with their pre-existing forms of civilisation, the same transformation of social functions, and thus of conduct and the whole personality, began to take place in countries outside Europe. This is the picture which emerges if we attempt to survey the course followed up to now by the Western civilising movement in social space as a whole. (Elias 2012a [1939], 427)

An additional argument, relevant for understanding what was to be summarised later in the concepts of “diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties” and “functional democratisation” is that, with the differentiation of social functions, an “*open or latent ambivalence*” emerges in all human relationships. And this, as I will argue in greater detail in section 6 below, is a “basic condition of the civi-

lisation of conduct” which at least partly explains why the level of functional democratisation can also rise together with functional differentiation in dictatorships or, in more general terms, in expanding networks of interdependency that are not ruled according to democratic principles.

The term “functional” as a prefix to “democratisation” is used in contrast to “institutional democratisation.” “Functional democratisation,” the lessening of power gradients and social inequalities, is not related to the institutions of a democracy. They result from the blind long-term processes of differentiation and integration of social functions of various kinds (economic, political, affective, sexual, and so on) that people perform for each other and that link them together in the interdependency networks of their survival groups.

This framework of connections and processes that makes up the “civilising theory” was drawn up in the 1930s, but until his death in 1990, Elias did not think that the processes of differentiation and integration of social functions, nor those of functional democratisation, had stalled or changed direction. On the contrary, he saw them change in the same direction. This is quite evident, for example, in his 1987 essay on the we-I balance (Elias 2010 [1987]). The process of informalisation has also continued in the same direction since the 1880s, although there is evidence of its continuation as a spiral process of alternating short-term phases of informalisation and formalisation, the latter consisting mainly of formalisation of previous informalisation – that is: reformalisation. In the 1980s, the strong wave of informalisation in the “Expressive Revolution” was followed by a phase of reformalisation. Reformalisation, however, is not a change of direction but a consolidation and integration of previously informalised conduct and steering codes (for empirical evidence of this, see my book *Informalisation*; 2007, Chapter 6).

In the 21st century, processes of functional democratisation, informalisation, and reformalisation continued in the same direction, but as they differentiated further, generating a clear understanding of them became somewhat complicated because of a strong advance in globalisation processes. This apparently did not coincide with functional democratisation, at least not in the wealthier West, while China and India were booming. The advance in global differentiation and integration was accompanied by changing balances of power both within and between countries. It also entailed changes in relations between the world of money, involving functions that provide material security, and the world of politics, involving functions that provide physical safety via taxation. Since the 1900s, in addition to these increasingly complex processes, declining national and continental inequalities coincided with a globally declining percentage of people living in “extreme poverty”: in 2013, according to World Bank studies, 10.7 percent of the world’s population lived in “extreme poverty,” that is, on



less than US\$1.90 a day (inflation-corrected), compared to 35 percent in 1990.<sup>2</sup> Changes like these further obscured the understanding of trends and counter-trends – whether they can be interpreted as “functional democratisation” on a global scale remained difficult to assess. Yet it seems obvious that, at present, differentiation and integration of social functions are continuing on a global scale, and as such obliges all who study them to develop and maintain a global perspective.

In this context, sociologist Stephen Mennell launched the concept of “functional de-democratisation,” first in his book *The American Civilising Process* (2007) and later in two articles (2014a; 2014b). He raises the following key question, at least implicitly, if not explicitly: Have the processes of functional democratisation and informalisation changed direction? It is impossible to answer this question without knowing the extent to which these developments have extended to a global level. And it is also important to establish whether, where, and to what extent the processes of social differentiation and integration have stalled, changed direction, or ceased altogether. I would like to address these questions here.

In an earlier article on “Informalisation and Social Stratification from a Global Perspective” (1990), I addressed very similar questions, although I did not use the concept of “functional democratisation.” This article addressed the connection between social equalisation or the decrease in institutionalised power differences – that is, in social stratification – and the spread of informalisation in the West. It also addressed the “debt crisis” and “the many who speak of an increasing gap between rich and poor countries.” This paradox provokes several questions:

What are the factual processes from which this increasing gap between rich and poor states can be diagnosed? And to what extent will such a trend prevent a global process of social equalisation and informalisation from becoming dominant? Will the trend towards ‘diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties’ between *classes* [...] continue on a global scale between *states*? What are the chances that the structured changes in the West will spread to the global level? These questions demand a comparison of the development of the relationships between the classes in the West and that between rich and poor states on the planet. (Wouters 1990, 70)

I extend this approach here, but it is appropriate to mention a major difference between 1990 and now: the serious consequences of globalisation for Western labour markets have since become increasingly clear, and they were generally underestimated at the time.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>>.

<sup>3</sup> In my 2011 article, “How Civilising Processes Continued: Towards an Informalisation of Manners and a Third Nature Personality,” I also brought up questions from 1990, but because the evidence used was based mainly on studying manners books published in four

However, if these questions are addressed from a global perspective, in addition to informalisation and functional democratisation, two other side effects of social differentiation and integration come into view: integration conflicts and disintegration, including defunctionalisation. Before I get to that, I would like to focus on the introduction of the concept of “functional democratisation” because it is often misunderstood, as we shall see from the example of how “functional de-democratisation” was introduced.

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### 3. The Introduction of Functional Democratisation and its “Counterpart”

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Elias introduces the concept of functional democratisation in *What is Sociology?* (2012b [1970], 59-65), and he presents it as a cornerstone of his theory. The context is polemical. The “overall social transformation,” he writes, continuing his old fight against reductionism, is usually labelled by only one of its aspects, such as “industrialisation, scientification, bureaucratisation, urbanisation, democratisation or the growth of nationhood” (ibid., 59).<sup>4</sup> Without a model of their interrelations, he claims, conceptual divisions such as these will lead sociology astray. The same goes for mentally dividing societies into economic, political, and social spheres, because these divisions obstruct the possibility of overcoming “the sociological problems posed by the common direction of development in many state-societies.” This direction “has to be brought to light not just in one sphere but in the all-pervading transformation of human relationships” (ibid., 59-60). A helpful question relating to this transformation is “What overall change in the structure of each of these societies has caused the ruling strata of previous centuries to decline in power in relation to the social heirs of those who were often referred to as the common herd?,” and another question: “Why societies oligarchically ruled by the hereditarily privileged were transformed into societies ruled by the recallable representatives of mass political parties?” (ibid., 60-1).

In two sections of *What is Sociology?*, Elias discusses the trend towards the reduction of power differentials, distinguishing a reduction between rulers and ruled, and between different social strata. At the end of these two sections he introduces the concept of functional democratisation, but only after pointing to an inherent regularity, an unintended side effect that damages people, their functions, and power ratios:

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Western countries since the 1880s, the answers were mainly restricted to Western developments.

<sup>4</sup> Elias starts by re-humanising these de-humanised concepts, for example by writing “industrialisation ultimately means nothing more than that more and more people came to be occupied as entrepreneurs, white collar employees and manual workers” (ibid., 60).

[A]gain and again in the course of social differentiation and corresponding integration, certain social groups have suffered reductions in the scope of their functions, and even total loss of function; the consequence has been loss of power potential. But the overall trend of the transformation was to reduce all power potentials between different groups, even down to those between men and women, parents and children.

This trend is referred to by the concept of ‘functional democratisation’. It is not identical with the trend towards the development towards ‘institutional democracy’. It refers to a shift in the social distribution of power, and this can manifest itself in various institutional forms, for example in one-party systems as well as in multi-party systems. (ibid., 63)

In the next sentence, which opens section 3, Elias highlights the importance of this trend:

Central to this whole social transformation have been impulses towards growing social specialisation or differentiation in all social activities. Corresponding to these have been impulses towards integration of the specialised activities – integration that has often lagged behind the differentiation. [...] Because of their particular specialised functions, all groups and individuals become more and more functionally dependent on more and more others. (ibid., 63-4)

In section 4, Elias focuses on two types of intellectual orientation – the scientific and the ideological – that have usually developed in close association with this transformation. Referring to the structural properties which enabled people to become aware of themselves as societies, he writes:

Paramount among them is functional democratisation, the narrowing of power differentials and development towards a less uneven distribution of power chances; it permeates the whole gamut of social bonds, although there are impulses simultaneously running counter to this trend. (ibid., 64-5)

After having introduced “functional democratisation” in *What is Sociology?*, Elias continues to use the concept, but with little clarification, and at times almost casually, without reference to what he here describes as “central to this whole social transformation”: the “growing social specialisation or differentiation in all social activities.” For example, when he writes, “the thrust towards diminishing the power gradient between rulers and ruled, between the entire state establishment and the great mass of outsiders” (2013a, 34), he no longer explains why this democratisation is “functional.” It then apparently turns into “the equalising process,” usually along with hints at impulses and processes “simultaneously running counter to this trend.”

These quotations from Elias’s introduction of functional democratisation reveal he is open to part-processes of disintegration that accompanied functional democratisation and social integration. Accordingly, he takes care to present both equalisation and its counter-trend, for example, by first drawing attention to social groups that suffered reductions or even total loss of function and power potential, before continuing: “but the overall trend of the transformation was to reduce all power potentials between different groups, even down to those between men and women, parents and children” (ibid., 63). Thus, he clearly

presents “functional democratisation” as a balance-concept,<sup>5</sup> raising the question of how strong the impulses and processes towards increasing social inequality have actually been and, more specifically, which people and groups in fact “suffer reductions or even a total loss of function and power potential.”

Only with a balance-concept like this is it possible to grasp that as networks of interdependency expand and become denser, both social equality *and* inequality tend to increase, and that “functional democratisation” is compatible with increasing social inequality. As the differentiation of social functions and organisations proceeded and expanded, sooner or later this was followed by their coordination/integration at more and higher levels. On the one hand, these processes implied decreasing inequalities via functional democratisation, a process in which the bonds between the people involved became more dense and intense and with less social and psychic distance between them. On the other hand, inequalities also increased, if only because the co-ordination and administration of multi-levelled social organisations implied a longer and steeper hierarchy, and usually also because some people and their groups “suffer reductions or even total loss of function and power potential.” The key question is which side becomes dominant – equalisation, or its opposite? So questions that would help to avoid short-sightedness are: “Which side is dominant from a short-term perspective and (also) from a long-term perspective?” and “Which side is dominant in its scope for action and its corresponding levels of integration and complexity?”

The importance of these questions is highlighted by Elias’s article on “social processes” in which he calls universal progress a myth. He grounds this remark in the example of “weapons and tools, which gave a particular society advantages in struggles for survival with other groups and with non-human nature,” but “groups which did not adopt them were defeated and disappeared. In retrospect,” he adds, “people see only the apparent smooth progress of technology, and not the elimination struggles behind it, which consume human beings” (2009c [1986], 8).

In tacit agreement with Elias, Eric Dunning writes polemically about Émile Durkheim, whose analysis of the division of labour:

contains a fundamental flaw that derives from his failure to recognise that functional interdependence or division of labour does not lead necessarily to harmonious and co-operative integration but is conducive, even in its ‘normal’ forms, to conflict and antagonism. In short, his concept of the society based on ‘organic solidarity’ is Utopian. (Dunning 2008 [1979], 216-7)

In other words, Durkheim presents a one-dimensional view of the connection between lengthening chains of interdependency and social equalisation.

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<sup>5</sup> For more on balance-concepts, see Wouters 2019a.

In the section entitled “Functional de-democratisation” of his book on *The American Civilizing Process*, Stephen Mennell draws attention to the 20th-century trends toward social equalisation and informalisation,

[which] from some standpoints may appear the dominant feature of the last century. In the counterpoint of history, however, they can be interwoven with contrary trends. Elias paid less attention to the possibility of what may be called functional de-democratisation and its effects. Yet in his writings and those of subsequent researchers who have followed his lead, there are important clues as to the genesis and consequences of functional de-democratisation. (2007, 311)

However, the “important clues” he mentions remain concealed and unspecified. Mennell abstains from further clarification. While he does refer to “increasing disparities in wealth and power,” Mennell does not specify the relation between these disparities and the italicised concept. At the end of his discussion of the “economic crisis” since 2007/2008, Mennell again raises

some points of criticism or clarification about Elias’s ideas, particularly about [...] the confidence he often expressed that the overall trend of human society was towards longer chains of interdependence, which would tend to bring with them relatively more equal power ratios between the various links in the chain – ‘functional democratisation’. (2014a, 2)

Mennell jumps to the conclusion that when it comes to today’s expanding interdependency networks, “in important respects the big picture is of functional *de*-democratisation.” In an even stronger formulation he writes: “on the larger scale, there are very powerful forces of functional *de*-democratisation at work.” Again, these “powerful forces” remain unspecified. Instead, Mennell draws attention to “the financiers and their political allies,” who “increasingly see the need neither to pay their taxes nor to compare their remuneration with that of their fellow countrymen and countrywomen,” arguing that balances of power between upper and lower strata “appear to be tipping back in favour of the more privileged, and global interdependences are increasingly interwoven with countries’ internal power ratios” (ibid., 12).

In his article “Globalisation and the ‘American Dream,’ ” Mennell uses Elias’s term “polyphony of history,” commenting that Elias “would not have been surprised to find that early in the twenty-first century alongside continuing strands of functional democratisation there is evidence of the growing strength of the opposite: what I have labelled ‘functional de-democratisation’” (2014b).<sup>6</sup> He then goes on to provide evidence of “increasing inequality in America,” which he uses to justify this “label.”

The observation that increasing global interdependence coincides with growing inequality in nation-states seems accurate, at least in some states. But Mennell only backs this up with a rather casual moral argument, and by deploying Elias as a source of authority. Both this “authority argument” to legiti-

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<sup>6</sup> <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0003.206>>.

mise his “label” and his “correction” of Elias suggest that Mennell is standing on the shoulders of the great sociologist, but because he does not clarify what he means by de-democratisation, nor what is “functional” about it, many questions remain unanswered. In what sense is this *de-democratisation functional*?<sup>7</sup> Does the word “functional” keep the same meaning when wedded to democratisation and de-democratisation?<sup>8</sup> And if it is the counterpart of “functional democratisation,” as Mennell claims, should it not be called “defunctional de-democratisation”? How and to what extent is this concept related to rising social inequality, and on what scale do these processes occur? Is it really “the big picture,” or is it mainly big in the USA? These questions are not raised, suggesting his perspective more Western than global. This critique also applies to the articles of sociologists Nico Wilterdink and Behrouz Alikhani in the journal *Historical Social Research* (2017), for they adopt the term “functional de-democratisation” together with a largely western-centred perspective on globalisation.<sup>9</sup> What these three sociologists have in common is that they ignore the possibility that, when industries, capital, and commerce were moved to cheap-labour countries, functional democratisation continued on the corresponding higher (global) level of integration, while being accompanied (also or particularly) in expensive-labour countries with defunctionalisation, integration conflicts, and disintegration. The continuation on a higher integrative level implies that the questions regarding the projected dominant direction of these changes – whether they represent a trend towards social equality and/or social inequality – only make sense if they are raised and answered from a global

<sup>7</sup> Many thanks to Stephen Vertigans for this observation.

<sup>8</sup> Many thanks to Andrew Linklater for this question.

<sup>9</sup> Wilterdink does not focus on whether functional democratisation or functional differentiation and integration have become dominant global trends. He does not understand “functional democratisation” as a balance-concept and seems more concerned with developing concepts with a universal and therefore timeless validity: “If there is a connection between functional differentiation and growing networks of interdependence on the one hand and decreasing inequality of power and privileges on the other,” he writes, “it is apparently valid for only specific historical periods under specific conditions” (2017, 29). The word “only” in this sentence suggests a deficiency, but a social science that aims for timeless universal truths is surely deficient. Social developments and connections can only be understood and explained from their specific historical period and specific conditions. Replacing the word “valid” for the word “dominant” would change the meaning of the sentence in this direction, but it would still not rise beyond a truism. Both “validity” and “dominance” will always be dependent on “specific conditions” in specific periods. Only these can explain their rise to dominance and/or their becoming dominated by defunctionalisation and/or disintegration. Alikhani discusses “the ongoing translation of economic power into political power and vice versa,” and in this context he mentions Mennell and Wilterdink because they also “made use of the concept of ‘functional de-democratisation’ to grasp the direction of such transformations in US society and politics” (ibid., 198). Later, he dropped the word “functional” and thus the term “de-democratisation” came to designate the object of his research into current political processes that others also refer to as “post-democratic.”

perspective. To what extent has functional democratisation continued on a global level? And where and how was the spurt of globalisation accompanied with defunctionalisation, integration conflicts, and disintegration?

Seen from the global perspective of an ongoing and encompassing global intertwining of functional interdependency networks, an explanation of the rise of social inequalities such as those in the USA in terms of a shrivelling of these networks is inconceivable. In fact these networks continued to expand across the globe, increasing in strength and density, changing the balance of power between all parties involved, including the balance of power between the world of commerce and the world of politics. Since the rise of social inequalities cannot be explained by *shrinking* networks of functional interdependency, we must look for an explanation elsewhere.

To link the dubious concept of functional de-democratisation to the rise of social inequalities, suggesting it has similar explanatory power as its counterpart of “functional democratisation” is a theoretical error that stems mainly from a one-dimensional view of the connection between lengthening chains of interdependency and social equalisation. It is one-sided for the same reason that Eric Dunning criticised Durkheim, which is that it turns a blind eye to the flip side of differentiation and integration: the unintended side effects of integration conflicts and disintegration processes, including defunctionalisation.

It seems clear that functional differentiation and integration processes have not reached a relative stability on a higher integrative (global) level, and that it remains difficult – and therefore a matter of dispute – to establish whether or indeed when a further step in the processes of functional democratisation and informalisation becomes dominant. However, for the same reason it is misguided to interpret the rise of social inequalities in large parts of the rich Western world in terms of “functional de-democratisation.”

Expanding interdependencies do not by definition lead to decreasing power differences, and we should not expect that to happen with necessity or certainty, or immediately or automatically. They may be restricted to limited areas and levels, and not occur at all in others. They may also trigger integration conflicts and processes of disintegration and defunctionalisation, involving smaller or larger groups of people. Therefore, the theory and analysis of functional democratisation and informalisation calls for a sharp focus on which areas and levels of integration are involved, as well as levels of disintegration, and the tension-balance between the two. Both emerge as side effects of the differentiation, integration, and increasing complexity of social functions. They are “side effects” because, seen from the perspective of “big history” and human history as a whole, the processes of differentiation, integration, and increasing complexity have developed in the same direction, and thus have remained dominant process drivers.

It is important to integrate part-processes of disintegration, defunctionalisation, and integration conflicts into a theory of long-term functional democratisation because both trends – decreasing inequalities via functional democratisation as well as increasing inequalities via defunctionalisation and disintegration

– have occurred throughout human history as two unintended side-effects of social differentiation and integration.

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#### 4. Processes of Integration with Part-Processes of Disintegration and Defunctionalisation as Unintended Side Effects: Examples on Various Levels

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From the earliest regimes of fire and agrarian production, human organisations expanded and became increasingly interdependent via differentiation and integration of social activities or functions. Some groups have lost their power potential because they lagged behind in the specialisation or differentiation of functions and/or because they could not make their social organisation strong and competitive enough to prevent them from losing power and survival chances.

In these processes, whole survival units – including state societies – apparently lost functions and defunctionalised to the extent that they became, or were perceived to become, what are known today as “failed states.” Examples include Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. From this perspective, the European refugee crisis since 2015 – most refugees fled these three countries – is an example of part-processes of disintegration and defunctionalisation which are unintended side effects that damage people, their functions, and their property. Elias writes about the defunctionalisation of priests, knights, and kings, “the defunctionalizing of the family by the state,” and he also presents a more general statement:

A defunctionalisation of existing specialisms can be observed again and again in the course of social development. They may be restricted to specific enclaves of the structure of social functions as in the case, for example, when handloom weavers are defunctionalized by factory production using mechanical looms [...] It may comprise the whole function-structure of an integrated social unit [...]. In the territories of the former Western [Roman] Empire, this trend towards the contradiction of differentiation, towards the defunctionalisation of previously existing specialisms reached its high point in the early feudal societies. (Elias 2009d [1977], 29)

However, among the groups that succeeded to survive, defunctionalisation and growing inequalities did not, on the whole, rise to dominance over “functional democratisation” – the growing equality that accompanies the expansion and strengthening of interdependency networks. As all groups and individuals became more and more functionally dependent on more and more others, all people bonded in such a network will have become less inclined to use violence for solving conflicts or to use other forms of constraints that would disturb the mutual interests of their bonds – including hierarchical ones – as these interests and bonds will have found a well-grounded place in their survival



unit. They usually provide a sense of belonging in combination with a certain protection against loss of material security and physical safety. They tend to become a taken-for-granted part of the group's culture – of its members' social habitus.

Notwithstanding counter movements such as the disintegration of the Roman Empire into the Dark Ages, processes of differentiation, integration, and functional democratisation have been dominant over the whole of human history, and with renewed strength and clarity from the 16th century onwards.<sup>10</sup> In Europe and the Middle East, they continued in more or less the same direction, taking the course of state formation processes in which "private" leaders of survival units such as war lords and knights became courtiers. From the courts, the "private" royal functions of managing the monopolies over the use of violence and taxation were gradually, or by revolution, transformed into the bureaucratic public functions of state institutions. It was an institutional democratisation, a transformation from private to public: state monopolies transferred into the hands of an increasingly wider public.

However, from a somewhat wider perspective it was also a process of *functional* democratisation, as shown by what happened in states such as Great Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, or France. Particularly in the 19th century, Elias writes, they saw "a strong advance of functional democratisation integrating practically all classes into the state structure," and these developments "brought a deep-rooted predisposition of the individual personality structures of people of all classes to live together in this specific form, as Danes, Dutch or French" (Elias 2010, 196).

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<sup>10</sup> Wilterdink (2017, 29) disagrees: "Since the emergence of agriculture," he writes, "functional differentiation and the growth of networks of interdependence went hand in hand with the growth of power differentials within and between human societies – increasing stratification, growing distance between elites and common people, sharper differentiation between rulers and ruled." This perspective places too much emphasis on growing inequality, thereby idealising previous societies and their simpler organisations as exhibiting greater equality. However, when human organisations expanded and gained complexity – which must have occurred ever since people learned to organise the control of fire, a long time before "agriculture" – they connected more people to each other. All of these people had to take more aspects of each other into account more frequently in order to live up to the codes of their organised living together – that is, according to the expanding functional differentiation, integration, and complexity of fire-regime societies (see Goudsblom 1992). Agrarian-regime societies followed, and so on. In that sense, they were becoming more "equal" and their steering codes came to avoid extreme behaviours more often – a diminishing of contrasts. These growing "equalities" coincided with the growing "inequalities" via social stratification and power differentials, and both trends have remained co-dominant (Wouters 2019a). Also, "more power differentiations" cannot simply be equated with "more inequality" for it usually means "more equality" in some respects and "more inequality" in others. The co-dominant trend of rising equalities gained ascendance over the trend of rising inequalities in the second part of the 19th century, which coincided with the process of informalisation.

Processes of functional democratisation have continued and permeated various parts and layers of people in various ways and degrees. Eventually, on the whole and in the long run, some of this functional democratisation has permeated every detail of the interdependency networks in question. In that sense, it was an all-pervasive process.

At present, so many processes of integration and disintegration are taking place simultaneously that observers often find themselves equipped with little means to appreciate which of them are more or less significant than others. On closer inspection, I think it is plausible that differentiation and integration processes within Western nation states and their national economies have been dominant and have increasingly achieved broader, more encompassing levels. However, in the course of reaching an international and then global level, differentiation and integration have simultaneously triggered integration conflicts and disintegration. Stark examples are World War I and World War II: both can be understood as integration conflicts with the disintegration of Europe as an initial side-effect, and the integration of Germany within Europe as a side-effect that took a little longer to realise. From this perspective, these wars appear as temporary fluctuations in the long-term development of social differentiation and integration, with functional democratisation as their long-term “side-effect.”

Adding a few simpler examples will probably help illustrate this balance between integration and disintegration. The first is from a late phase in Western national integration processes in which the welfare state and its institutions emerged and spread national incomes more equally among its citizens. The result was a significant decline in the fear of poverty and the spread of an “equanimity of the welfare state” (van Stolk and Wouters 1987; Wouters 2007, 214, 223). Welfare state organisations enabled women and young people to feel and act more independently of their husbands and fathers – a clear example of functional democratisation: on the level of the state, all citizens became more interdependent and, at the same time, many became less subordinate to their former (male) superiors. On the other hand, as the authority of the latter diminished, the volume of voices bemoaning and complaining about this loss increased, claiming the disintegration of traditional family life and the destruction of familial ties.

Over the past several decades, examples of integration processes that trigger integration conflicts and part-processes of disintegration are related increasingly to what David Riesman et al. (1950) would have conceptualised as transitions from tradition and inner-directed cultures and personalities to other-directed ones. Such transitions can also be understood in terms of integration conflicts and tensions between people living in cultures and countries where the phase of formalising manners and emotion regulation is still dominant, as opposed to those in countries where informalisation has spread. An example of this (also described in Wouters 2007, 206-8) is the national campaign launched

in 1995 by the Vietnamese authorities against what were called “negative foreign influences.” “American cultural imperialism” in particular was considered a serious threat to “traditional morals.” In the 1920s and 1930s, many European authorities used similar language. A Dutch government committee, for instance, warned against the “demoralising Americanisation of Europe.” The threat was disparagingly referred to as “instinctual life” with “primitive feelings.” Both the Dutch authorities in the inter-war years and the Vietnamese authorities in the 1990s took disciplinary measures to prevent the population becoming “estranged” or “alienated” from tradition and forming a treacherous union with “strangers” or “aliens” and their more informalised lifestyle. These examples of high-handed attempts at defending “traditional morals” can be extended globally by pointing to groups such as the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and Islamic State which feed on the same cause (see Dunning 2019). The social costs of these integration conflicts are clearly vast.

Another example of integration processes that trigger integration conflicts involves the merger waves that have swept through most western countries since the 1960s and 1970s (Wouters 1990a). Whether on the level of towns and cities, schools and universities, or business firms and corporations, the same story can be told again and again from the perspective of integration and functional democratisation, as well as from the perspective of disintegration or defunctionalisation. When I explained these two perspectives to a friend, a personnel manager who had witnessed a tidal wave of mergers between academies, colleges, and schools, he could easily provide examples of how, in the process of merging, independent schools and colleges lost cohesion and solidarity. “In the transition, the life and soul of these organisations was often severely damaged,” he said, “and you could sense it all over the place, in the teachers, the students, and in their relationships.” Most of them were mourning the loss of their old we-identity, and they rejected the possibility of identifying with the higher-level organisation as a sort of “treason.” As a side effect of integration, part-processes of disintegration can unintentionally damage or break social functions that people have performed for each other in a preceding phase of development. Such a loss of function can be experienced by them as the extinguishing of a significant source of what gave meaning to their jobs and their lives.

As the expanding networks of interdependence reach the periphery of the world, many citizens in the European Union also feel a loss of their old we-identity at the level of nation-states. They feel they have lost much of their former national independence and international status, which hurts their national pride; they seem to be in a state of mourning, anger, or both. They are hesitant or even feel repugnance towards identifying with higher organisational levels than the nation-state, and they would rather cling to their national territorial borders and symbols. These feelings and longings are acknowledged by most political parties, and especially populist ones. As long as the we-

identification of people in these states remains predominantly on the level of their nation-states and continues to hamper the shift to higher organisational levels such as the European Union, this limited orientation and identification will continue to limit and diminish the power chances of all national political parties and governments, particularly when compared with the growing power chances of social organisations governing the world of finance and global corporations. Even when populists win, take over the government, and decide to leave higher-level organisations such as the European Union, they may increase their power chances nationally but decrease and hamper their spread internationally.

From the 1980s onward, as capital, commerce, and whole industries moved from Western countries to cheap-labour countries, this global trend was accompanied with defunctionalisation, integration conflicts, and disintegration, not only in countries with cheap labour, but also in those where labour is relatively expensive. In the West, research for the *McKinsey Global Institute*<sup>11</sup> reported that between 2005 and 2014, real incomes in 25 advanced economies “were flat, or fell, for 65-70 percent of households [in USA 81%], or more than 540 million people. The most seriously affected are young, less-educated workers, raising the real risk of a generation growing up poorer than their parents.” Particularly since the 2008/2009 crisis, a decline of optimism, spurred by declining and/or stagnant wages, was mirrored by a rise of optimism in the East. In 2017, IPSOS global research reported an “optimism divide” between East and West.<sup>12</sup> The mirror-image can also apply to the world of technology and beyond – US market capitalism mirrors Chinese state capitalism. Although “state surveillance” and “market surveillance” are backed up by very different ideologies, both systems do not differ much in their totalitarian approach, while their big tech companies are becoming increasingly entwined on global markets, where ideological differences increasingly become secondary (van Dijck 2019, 24).

As a rule, defunctionalisation in rich countries attracts more attention in the West than when it happens far away from it. These are common manifestations of an identification with the established we-groups of the West as a kind of global upper class. Eurocentric or occidental manifestations of such an identification are commonly formed and expressed in defence against expanding and/or rising groups of local and/or global outsiders. Among the established, the feeling of being threatened by outsiders often triggers them to close their ranks, thereby trying to reinforce their position as part of a globally established upper-class of rich countries and rich people.

This defence mechanism of the established often functions unwittingly, as it does in many forms of populism. It also functions unwittingly in dealing with

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<sup>11</sup> <<http://www.mckinsey.com>>.

<sup>12</sup> <<http://www.ipsosglobaltrends.com>>.

subjects such as global warming and climate change: many people are unaware of their Occidentalism as they congratulate themselves on advances towards *decreasing* their ecological “footprint” on the world, fully oblivious to the ecological costs of both outsourcing the production of goods to the other side of the world and of transporting finished products back to the West. From a global perspective, this “hidden impact” means that if the “external effects” or the global ecological costs of their lives and their lifestyle are included, Westerners are still *increasing* their “ecological footprint” across the world. In her book, *Hidden Impact*, Babette Porcelijn presents the example of “hidden energy”:

Rich Western countries have transferred many of their production facilities to low-wage countries such as China and India. The plants used in these countries use lots of energy to make stuff for our markets. Energy in the supply chain is not included in energy labels nor on your energy bill. This energy is invisible to us, the energy is hidden from our view. We import these things and therefore we finance hidden energy without knowing it. So, part of the national energy consumption in production countries should be on the tab of wealthy countries. (Porcelijn 2016, 34)

This hidden impact can only be revealed from a global perspective that exposes what remains hidden from established Western perspectives. The analogy with functional democratisation and disintegration is clear: only from a more detached view of the on-going *global* intertwining of social functions does it become possible to see the extent to which interdependency chains expanding on a global level coincide with rising social inequalities, defunctionalisation, and integration conflicts in the West, while in other places they coincide with some disruptive integration conflicts and with functional democratisation.

From this broader perspective, it seems possible and probable that continued global intertwining is connected with centrifugal (disintegrative) tendencies in some places as well as centripetal (integrative) trends in others. Therefore, looking at the world as a whole, an overall global trend of functional democratisation remains dominant. Hence, it is important to understand the long-term trend of functional democratisation – and whether it has lost or gained dominance – from the larger framework of rising levels of differentiation, integration, and increasing complexity, and to study the extent to which these processes have functional democratisation as well as disintegration and integration conflicts as their side effects.

Research into questions around which trend is dominant – or whether processes of differentiation, integration, and functional democratisation have stalled, cease altogether, or even change direction – needs to focus on both equalising and/or de-equalising side effects. Looking at “big history” and human history as a whole, the life processes of differentiation (competition), integration (co-operation), and increasing complexity (synthesis) have remained dominant as process drivers. And as differentiation and integration

processes became dominant on a global level, the processes of functional democratisation also continued on that level.

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## 5. Decolonisation as an Example of Functional Democratisation

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A significant moment in the expanding global network of interdependencies emerged when both competition through the accumulation of land and colonialism either diminished or came to an end. Decolonisation signalled the decline of the West as a globally established upper-class of rich countries, and in the eyes of many of its rich people their world was falling apart, but the disintegration that decolonisation entailed was a counter-current within a spurt of global integration and functional democratisation. To varying degrees, decolonisation also spread to the countries behind the iron curtain with the collapse of the USSR. Politically autonomous nation-states then became the globally accepted dominant standard of social organisation, a rule proven by the exception of the “failed state,” a concept that refers to a place where the state does not function “normally” and where individuals and groups suffer reductions or even total loss of function and power potential.

To a large extent, decolonisation can be understood in terms of functional democratisation. Within political and economic interdependency networks, functional differentiation had proceeded to a point where the desire for political democratisation could find political expression. After World War II, European colonial empires were exhausted and anti-colonial superpowers were competing for support in former colonies. The expansion of global networks reached a critical density, implying a functional democratisation that forced up the price of violence as well as the value of human life. In the post-colonial era, it became less likely simply to settle conflicts between nation-states by violent means such as dispatching armies or gun-boats. Bombing from planes and drones is still considered and practiced by those who think that bombing can win the battle, for example in wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. These wars, particularly the first two, centred around the ideological fears and dreams attached to the communist and capitalist power blocks. They were symptomatic of the global shift from a colonial competition for land towards an ideological competition for the best social organisation to provide a “good life” in terms of freedom, equality, and welfare. From the collapse of the USSR and the rise of a capitalist communism in China, the ideologies of the main power blocks lost much of their significance and distinctiveness, thus unveiling the bare competition for power with greater clarity. Global competition was increasingly revealed as a competition for commercial, industrial, and financial power – so much so that the conclusion of a widening gap between rich and poor states in the world is based on the criterion of income only. If that

comparison were also based on the balance of power and human dignity, then the fact that colonialism came to an end between the 1940s and the 1980s would entail the conclusion that the gap between rich and poor nations has also diminished. From this perspective, the decline of this gap can be seen as a continuation of the 19th-century development that brought a formal end to slavery, and both as parts of “the overall trend” of functional democratisation that was “to reduce all power potentials between different groups, even down to those between men and women, parents and children” (2012b [1970], 63). It implies that the process of “functional democratisation” extends at least some of its explanatory significance to the history of the emancipation of women, young people, and children from under the wings of husbands, adults, and parents.

In the last decades of the 20th century, the spread and intensification of restraints on international military intervention generated favourable conditions for internationally operating commercial and financial enterprises. A similar pacification process had occurred in an earlier era when territories were pacified internally and thus became nation-states. It was one of the major favourable conditions for commerce, industry, and finance to prosper on a national scale. Now, over extended pacified territories, the competitive struggle for the accumulation of money continued and intensified on a global scale. It is the global extension of the process in which the balance of power in court societies increasingly shifted from the aristocracy in favour of the functional and commercial bourgeoisie. In the post-colonial era, this shift extended from nation-states to the world at large, providing higher levels of physical safety as well as material security to an increasingly wider public. Simultaneously, violence receded to some extent as a means of settling conflicts on a national, international, and global scale, while the means of money advanced. This also means that those who provide physical safety functions have lost some of their former power and glory in the world of rich, materialistic, and relatively pacified countries in which virtually all eyes are focused on money and its discontents.

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## 6. Growing Interdependence Triggers an Ambivalence that Reduces Power Potentials between Groups: Functional Democratisation

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In his book on the process of civilisation, Elias claims that as networks of social interdependence expand and their links multiply and increase in density, “a specific duality or even multiplicity of interests manifests itself more strongly” in the relations between individuals as well as between different functional strata. In this argument, Elias describes the open or latent ambivalence that is crucial for understanding and explaining functional democratisation:

As social functions and interests become increasingly complex and contradictory, we find more and more frequently in the behaviour and feelings of people a peculiar split, a co-existence of positive and negative elements, a mixture of muted affection and muted dislike in varying proportions and nuances. The possibilities of pure, unambiguous enmity grow fewer; and, more and more perceptibly, every action taken against an opponent also threatens the social existence of its perpetrator – it disturbs the whole mechanism of chains of action of which each is a part. (2012a, 352–3)

At this point, Elias presents an example that is interesting also because he writes this in the mid-1930s, when Hitler and the Nazis were in power and he himself was in exile. After stating that “with the growing division of functions, the relations between different power units become increasingly ambivalent,” he continues:

The relations between states in our own time, above all in Europe, offer a clear example of this. Even if integration and the division of functions *between* them have not yet advanced as far as the division of functions *within* them, every military exchange nevertheless so threatens this highly differentiated network of nations as a whole that in the end the victor finds himself in a seriously shaken position. He is no longer able – or willing – to depopulate and devastate the enemy country sufficiently to settle a part of his own population in it. He must, in the interest of victory, destroy as far as possible the industrial power of the enemy, and at the same time, in the interest of his own peace, try within limits to preserve or restore his industrial apparatus. (ibid., 353)

Elias goes on to sketch the potential winnings of such a war – “colonial possessions, frontier revisions, export markets, economic, or military advantages” – and then drives home his point that

because in the struggles of highly complex societies, each rival and opponent [each nation-state] is at the same time a partner on the production line of the same machinery, every sudden and radical change in one sector of this network [of states] inevitably leads to a disruption and changes in another [...]. The inevitable conflicts grow increasingly risky for the whole precarious system of nations. However, through these very tensions and discharges the figuration moves slowly towards a more unequivocal form of hegemony, and towards an integration, perhaps at first of a federative kind, of larger units around specific hegemonic centres. (ibid., 353)

At this point, Elias continues his account by drawing social classes into the picture, arguing that

the relationship between different social classes *within* a dominion becomes, with the advancing division of functions, more and more ambivalent in the same way. Here, too, within a far more restricted space, groups whose social existence is mutually dependent through the division of functions are struggling for certain opportunities. They too are at one and the same time opponents and partners. There are extreme situations in which the existing organisation of a society functions so badly, and the tensions within it grow so large, that a large portion of the people and classes within it ‘no longer care’ [...].



Up to this revolutionary situation, the classes bound together by the division of functions are cast back and forth between their split and contradictory interests. [...] *the hour of the strong central authority within a highly differentiated society strikes when the ambivalence of interests of the most important functional groups grows so large, and power is distributed so evenly between them, that there can be neither a decisive compromise nor a decisive conflict between them.* It is a figuration of this kind to which the term ‘royal mechanism’ is applied here. (ibid., 353-55, italics in original)

People with functions in the world of politics – producing physical safety – and those with functions in the field of commerce and money – producing material security – are also opponents and partners at the same time. Particularly in the 19th century, the balance of power between them was clearly in favour of those representing the rising power of nation-states. They also offered chances and set limits to those representing the world of money. Status competition in and between increasingly complex societies and inherent tensions and discharges have moved all involved to further integration and intensification of being partners and opponents at the same time... until the people in the world of commerce exceeded their actions and power beyond national boundaries to a degree that tilted the balance of power more and more in their favour. At present, after four decades of this “globalisation,” there is an ongoing crisis in the world of politics. But this is not a “revolutionary situation” and the world seems far removed from the “*hour of the strong central authority*,” so the contours of a global “royal mechanism” remain vague.

Moreover, for many people in the West, these words will also have echoes of the past, for in the field of politics and as citizens of states, relations of power, and dependency between them are now distributed so evenly while becoming so complicated and dense that they take it for granted that neither a decisive compromise nor a decisive conflict between them are viable options. They live with levels of interdependency in which virtually all involved have learned to assess and negotiate their own and each other’s ability to live and operate as opponents and partners simultaneously. To a large extent this has become a normal tension-balance in their lives. Thus, this balance functions largely unknowingly as an important driving force behind the further development of their sensitivity and ability that is increasingly required in their ongoing status competition (Wouters 1992, 2011b, 2014).

In the West, therefore, the revolutionary option as a viable solution has practically disappeared. Revolutions and other decisive ways of escaping the ambivalence that comes with relatively equal power relations are reminiscent of the rather rigid status-ridden social relations between people who share a strong fear of slippery slopes and other characteristics of a second-nature type personality structure (Wouters 2012). More and more people now live in much closer social and psychic proximity to each other (for evidence, see Wouters 2007, chapter 4). From childhood on, they develop higher levels of mutually expected self-restraints and learn to be less rigid, less ruled by fears of slippery slopes,

and to be more open to their ambivalences, while at the same time releasing many inherent social and psychic tensions by playing with them in sensitive and flexible ways, thus strengthening the trend towards informalisation. In the era of informalisation, relational codes of mutual respect and equality have spread, while the relatively recent threats of global warming and mutually assured destruction (MAD) have added to these pressures, facilitating an identification with humanity as an undivided whole.

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## 7. On Processes of Social Differentiation and Integration: The Force of the Competition and Interweaving Mechanism

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In Elias's perspective on international relations and on the pervasive force of constraints at higher levels of differentiation, integration, and complexity, the division of social functions proceeds on the "production line" of "machinery" driven by the unremitting "mechanism of competition and monopoly" (Elias 2012a, 353). This may sound rather mechanistic and too absolute, since a monopoly is not decisive in enabling this movement, but what is decisive is a growing density and an expanding range of interdependency networks through the interweaving of human functions and activities. Therefore, I came to the conclusion (in Wouters 1990) that this mechanism is more adequately conceptualised as "competition and interweaving" because "competition" can be understood as the major driving force of differentiation, while "interweaving" can stand for integration. Thus, the processes of "competition and interweaving" are connected conceptually with those of "differentiation and integration."

In the commercial world as well as in the field of politics, competition (differentiation) and interweaving (integration) have been and continue to be major processes. Early on in the era of industrialisation, by the success and expansion of their businesses, private owners of enterprises were required to delegate to others more and more of the functions that originally, according to Fritz Croner's "delegation theory," were performed by owners themselves (1962, 132-3). This specific kind of division or differentiation of functions resulted from the expanding size of enterprises, from their bifurcations, and from the increasing complexity of the economy – they were major process drivers of capitalism. And not only of capitalism, but also of the "nationalisation" of states, a process that "went hand in hand with the growing power of the bourgeoisie, particularly as their language came to be transformed into the national language of France, Italy, or Germany," as Kuzmics et al. argue (2020, 15). Another major symptom and process driver of both capitalism and nationalisation can be found in the expanding stock market. "In 1850, three-quarters of the funds listed on the London stock exchange market were government bonds. The same

applied in Paris and Amsterdam. Stock exchanges were as yet of little significance to private companies” (Heilbron 2005, 8). The processes of competition and interweaving (differentiation and integration) continued, particularly in the long wave of globalisation from the 1870s to 1914, and again after World War I until the Great Depression. After World War II, this trend continued until more and more private ownership in the rich West was transformed into shared ownership via saleable shares on stock markets, thus creating a widening gap between owners or investors and entrepreneurs, comprising an increasingly wide variety of managers and CEOs.

Also in the world of politics and diplomacy, the present trend of competition and interweaving towards an increasingly global system of interdependent nation-states seems undisputed. In the words of Johan Goudsblom,

No one who is not bewildered by short-term fluctuations can fail to recognize this trend leading to ever more extensive social formations, controlled by ever more encompassing centres monopolizing the means of organized violence. That these growing monopolies are not immediately stable goes without saying. (1983)<sup>13</sup>

If we take the longer-term view of many centuries, from this perspective even major violent conflicts such as World War I and World War II become “temporary fluctuations” in the long-term development of nation-states and their regimes of manners and emotion regulation.

This view is also in keeping with the results of my study of changes in these regimes in four western countries since the 1880s. I concluded that “World War II functioned predominantly as a catalyst. Arguably, in terms of changes in the codes of manners and emotion regulation over the twentieth century, both major wars and their aftermath seem to have had little effect on the overall trend” (Wouters 2007, 173). I remember using the words “little effect” and “little independent lasting effect” hesitantly and reluctantly because of the obvious and lasting effect of Nazi brutalities on their victims, survivors, and their descendants. This realisation made it difficult to acknowledge that the atrocities of two big wars of the 20th century had “small significance for overall developments in regimes of manners and emotions.”

To do justice to the horrors of violent periods such as the two World Wars is only possible, of course, by zooming in on the atrocities. Looking at the significance of these periods within long-term processes, however, demands a relatively high level of detachment, which may arise from zooming in and out, by studying events alternately from a smaller and a greater distance. In this way, their place can be seen from a short-term perspective as well as from a long-term perspective, including a view on the moment when time stood still in

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<sup>13</sup> <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1983/06/16/elias-defended/>>.

horror as well as on the partial and passing moment of decivilisation. As long as the first view dominates and the second remains painful, mourning and/or shame will prevail, in which case the long-term perspective may lose so much validity and meaning that it meets with moral indignation. Any attempt to perceive and do justice to both presents a serious problem to the balance of involvement and detachment because it could trigger sometimes incompatible identifications and strongly conflicting emotions. Yet, the act of zooming in and out involves a central function for all human emotion regulation as well as a central task for all social science: to maintain a tenaciously high degree of identification with both the established and the outsiders, as we-groups and they-groups, on all levels and moments in the history of our lives, and in the context of humanity amid all other life on earth.

We do not have to zoom out far to see that we still live in the post-colonialist period, just past the early stages of the “Anti-Colonial Revolution.” Particularly after the end of the Cold War, this became increasingly apparent: processes of competition and interweaving had entangled nearly every state in global interdependency networks. In some parts of the world, former colonialists had become the established powers in large states such as the USA, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand, states that now more or less counted as belonging to the West, while the original inhabitants of these established colonialist-states were marginalised as outsiders on their land.<sup>14</sup> Representations of formerly colonised peoples by the former colonisers followed the pattern of established-outsider relations according to which the identity of the outsiders in the view of the established is usually modelled after its minority of the worst and the identity of the established is modelled after its minority of the best. In processes of decolonisation, romanticised as well as demonised representations of both colonised and colonising people were attacked, for example by Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Edward Saïd’s *Orientalism* (1978). The pressure of attacks resulted in a differentiation of representations in the direction of “decreasing contrasts, increasing varieties,” but they did not disappear – far from it, as the balance of power between the formerly colonised and colonising peoples is still very unequal.

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<sup>14</sup> The meaning of “land” as in “Always was, always will be Aboriginal land,” a slogan claiming sovereignty.

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## 8. On the Shifting Balance of Power Between Politicians (Physical Safety) and Business People (Material Security)

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The ongoing competition and cooperation between and among states and industries have exerted pressures in the direction of increasing global interdependencies, generating two questions.

The first question is comparative, and it stems from earlier processes of state formation in which the earlier “private” control over the state’s provision of physical safety via the monopolies of taxation and the use of violence came into the hands of an increasingly wider public: *Have competition and interweaving processes in the world of money developed to an extent where their function of providing material security are also shifting from private to public?*

The second question: *Have social functions in the world of finance and commerce expanded with greater force and rapidity in the last half a century compared to the world of politics and diplomacy?* (Kapteyn 1996; Blomert 2012).

As businesses grew during industrialisation, private ownership was increasingly transformed into shared ownership: issuing shares was another step towards the shift from a private to a more public operation of many social organisations providing material security. A further move in this direction took place in many European states in which national income was shared via taxation and the reallocating principles of welfare state institutions. In the formation of welfare states, the provision of physical safety and material security to some extent intermingled and contributed to the expansion of both the world of politicians and government and the world of business people and finance. It was a period of economic growth in which the “powers” of the world of commerce, industry, and finance as well as those in the field of politics were rising. Then, the two largely evened each other out because the power balance arena was still largely restricted by national boundaries and also because of negotiated agreements between political parties and workers unions through which governments could use “the right to work” to pressurise entrepreneurs and their industries (Blomert 2012). Until the 1970s, the balance of power arena hardly exceeded the magnitude of single nation-states.<sup>15</sup> And most of the richer states

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<sup>15</sup> This can be confirmed by an example taken from my thesis of 1971, in which I observed a trend towards monopolisation on the basis of increasing numbers of “giant multi-national businesses.” I added that the economy page of a Dutch national newspaper, *De Volkskrant* (Amsterdam), mentions an estimated 500 of these giants exist. In 2016, about 60,000 transnational corporations with about 500,000 branches were spread across the world (Kordos and Vojtovic 2016, 152).

still had a complex established regime to regulate commerce, industry, and capital.

During the 1980s, many of these regulations were softened and/or changed in favour of the “free market.” In 1983, an administrator of the *World Bank* commented, “The new gods are the free market and private enterprise; the new devils are governments and planning agencies.”<sup>16</sup> The 1980s saw power ratios shift from a favourable climate for national politicians in the direction of a more favourable national and international commercial climate, along with the neo-liberal politics of competitive deregulation. As the growth of trade and industry coincided with a deregulation of capital markets, increasing numbers of people were subjected to its “iron laws” in a wave of company takeovers in the USA starting in the 1970s. Increasing international waves of mergers and takeovers signalled a newly prosperous global and globally organised world of money which penetrated, and to some extent came to dominate, the political world, both on a national and a global level.

Merger waves and other integration processes were rapidly increasing to international and global levels, for example, by global enterprises transferring labour-intensive production to countries where labour was cheap and plentiful. In these low-income and low-wage countries, the transfer was welcomed for the opportunities it brought, providing work and raising income, but it also placed these countries in competition with each other. Similar processes occurred on a global scale, as governments in poor countries came under rising competitive pressures to enforce the kind of policies that would attract companies and capital investors (Wouters 2007, Appendix 1). Since the 1990s, relatively poor nation-states in eastern EU countries came to function as low-cost labour centres, and in the process their governments were increasingly drawn into a competition for western European capital and investments, resulting in spirals of decreasing taxes on the profits of multinational corporations and increasing restrictions on labour unions. These spirals widened to increasingly include more and also more affluent countries in the West. The importation of “market civilisation” (Gills 1995; Linklater 2012) was part and parcel of “the disciplinary force of the market” (Haskell 1985, 561).

Since then, predominantly from a global perspective, the field of politics apparently lags further and further behind the world of money, particularly with regard to integrating their social functions to higher levels. This can be understood from the fact that politicians, particularly in complex democracies, are always highly dependent upon their constituents and the people running a large number of highly complex democratic institutions, and they will have to please them in order to be (re)elected and remain in power. In comparison, the people running commercial, industrial, and financial businesses are far less restricted

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<sup>16</sup> Prof. I. van Dam in NRC Handelsblad, July 1, 1983, also quoted in Wouters 1986.

in how they run their companies, and to some extent they are able to escape geographical limits to their activities by moving their money and their companies to more profitable places in the world.

Politicians are unable to do this, of course – they cannot serve their constituencies from abroad, and in addition, they are bound to their country for reasons of “state security.” The rise and spread of public welfare-state institutions may have appeared to many as the completion of national differentiation and integration, but functional differentiation remained firmly restricted to the internal affairs of nation-states. Their inter-relationships – their “foreign policy” or “external affairs” – were held in the hands of an oligarchy of national politicians, if only “for reasons of state security” (cf. Elias 2010, 205-6). This is another reason why the integration of the field of politics increasingly lags behind that in the world of money, and why the taken-for-granted framework and point of departure for politicians in discussing topics related to processes of differentiation, integration, and democratisation have continued to be the nation-state or groups comprising them.

“State security” was also a way in which powerful countries such as the USA and the UK ensured their national power politics would prevail over international rights by ignoring the United Nations and breaking agreements made within this global institution by going to war in Iraq – a demonstration of might-is-right in a display of “shock and awe.” Their policy backfired because no weapons of mass destruction were found, and therefore “state security” was not an issue, but it also backfired because, by violating and breaking the symbolic unity of the UN, they significantly lowered its power and status. The war diminished the chance of enlarging the power of this global organisation of politicians, and it also hampered the development and rise of an oligarchy of international politicians that could advance additional global regulations intended to prevent violations of “state security.” In addition, it reduced the chances of developing a policy that would set limits and rules to the power of the global oligarchy of commercial and financial “aristocrats,” or “moneycrats.” When the USA and the UK pushed the UN aside and invaded Iraq, they also affected the balance of power between the world of politics and the world of money in favour of the latter: in absence of a strong global political organisation and a corresponding global political oligarchy, the finance oligarchs could play the oligarchies of national politicians more easily against one another.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In 2009, when official US troops were withdrawn from Iraq, the US government allowed commercial organisations such as defence contractors and private military companies to move into the created power vacuum for to provide “security.” A somewhat similar process on a national scale had occurred when the success of the US government in its war against the Mafia and its “protection rackets” created many a power vacuum that were left for commercial companies to fill.” Both cases illustrate and demonstrate how, in comparison to most European states, the US state monopoly of violence is lagging behind.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) came to a similar position of decline. Early in 2018, President Trump abused a WTO treaty by appealing to “state security” as a legal basis for announcing the imposition of heavy tariffs on imports of steel and aluminium to the USA. This neo-mercantilist policy is indicative of how Trump runs the USA: as a business corporation and thus he undermines the operation of the WTO. Pascal Lamy (former Euro-commissioner and director-general of WTO) admitted “the necessity of preparing for plan B: a WTO without the USA” (*NRC Handelsblad* March 10, 2018). George W. Bush and Tony Blair, and later Theresa May, Donald Trump, and Boris Johnson (and their supporters) are seeking to address nationalist concerns by challenging the dominance of global interdependencies. Meanwhile, Chinese political and commercial oligarchs expand their global presence.

This exemplifies how people in the fields of money and politics intermingle on a global scale. It also shows how the common interests and power sources of business people and finance oligarchy around the globe increased to the extent that many people came to believe that “what is good for the economy, is good for the nation.” National interests were increasingly understood in terms of economic interests, particularly in the USA: “It might be an exaggeration to say that the American government is now a wholly-owned subsidiary of big business – but not much of an exaggeration” (Mennell 2014b), and even less since President Trump.

In the 1980s, managing money was becoming an industry in itself. More and more private citizens became investors: “In the 1970s, about 400,000 people invested in stocks and shares in the Netherlands; by 2000, just before the decline of the market, the number had risen to almost two million” (Heilbron 2005, 5). Institutional investors such as pension funds and mutual funds flooded the stock markets and became “the dominant force in the functioning of financial markets as well as in the development of large firms” (Heilbron 2005, 3). This brought about a collectivisation of private stock ownership, it did not result so much in “pension fund socialism,” but rather in a rise of shareholder power and an “investor capitalism” that is based on ownership, not entrepreneurship (Heilbron 2005, 14). Investor capitalism is characterised and driven by managerial shareholder activism and hostile takeovers. The short-term motive of these takeovers – to get as much money as possible out of shares – often dominates more long-term entrepreneurial motives. Company managers who fail to base their business orientation consistently on shareholders’ interests were put under serious pressure:

[They] saw their share prices fall, increasing their vulnerability to a takeover. Dependency on the stock market forced the management to adapt to the new balance of power, and many top managers did so by securing better pay and protection. Provisions for golden parachutes in the event of dismissal, together with share and option plans were soon standard elements of managers’ contracts. With pay dependent on share prices, the interests of top management and shareholders coincided far more than before, and increasing shareholder



value came to prevail over other company objectives. [...] For professional investors the important thing is not so much to determine which shares have the highest return, but to find out which shares are likely to be most popular with other investors. (Heilbron 2005, 16)

Thus, the popularity contest that is deeply rooted in American culture – and explained through America's relatively open status competition in absence of a central good society with good-society functions such as regulating social mobility and status competition (see Wouters 2004, 2007, 2011b, 2014)<sup>18</sup> – has now penetrated further, deep into the stock market and American capitalism.

While the watchdogs of big-business managers have shifted from the pressures of compromise negotiations with governments and labour unions in the 1960s and 1970s to the watchdog pressures of shareholders from the 1990s on, governments and unions have receded into the background. In recent years, the voices of protest against this trend have been rising and even seem to get some support from inner circles of American capitalism. In August 2019, The Business Roundtable, America's most powerful lobby group of corporate leaders, released a new mission statement on "the purpose of a corporation" that integrated the interests of shareholders with those of stake holders such as workers, clients, suppliers, consumers, and society at large. It was a reformulation away from the Anglo Saxon Model of "shareholder capitalism" in the direction of the Rhineland model of "stakeholder capitalism." In what they call "*conscious capitalism*," their interests are no longer "only relevant as a derivative of the duty to stockholders."<sup>19</sup> A similar type of change is captured in the spread of terms such as "inclusive capitalism" and "sustainable capitalism."

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<sup>18</sup> The following quotations will give an impression of the explanatory power of this connection: "Wide use of exaggeration and superlatives is symptomatic of uncertainty of rank, of porous and changing social dividing lines. This characteristic is connected in explanatory ways to the process-continuity of the absence of a unified and centralised good society, as it still largely functions in the UK. In the USA, a relatively open competition between a large variety of centres of power and good societies, and also a stronger reliance upon supervision and other forms of external social controls have formed a barrier to the development of lower-pitched or subtler forms of expression and negotiation. [...] Open competition and its related status-striving may also explain why Americans are more directly and more openly concerned with social success in terms of popularity. In American etiquette books, manners and popularity are closely linked. The manners books from the other countries under study use the term 'success' or 'social success' in the sense of gaining respect and appreciation, but the term 'popularity' is entirely absent. The close link in American manners books seems to be another symptom of relatively high status insecurity and status consciousness" (Wouters 2007, 160-1). For how "dating as a way of courting soon became a contest for popularity, producing a peculiar mixture of competitive conformity," see Wouters, *Sex, and Manners*, 2004, here: 94, with advice such as "The intelligent girl does not have to 'pet' to be popular" (Wallace 1941, 179). See also Willard Waller's "The rating and dating complex" (1937) and Beth Bailey's *From Front Porch to Back Seat* (1988).

<sup>19</sup> <<https://www.businessroundtable.org/media/all-statements>>.

“The global market is on a rampage. It needs to be tamed” says Pascal Lamy, former member of the European Commission (1999-2004) and Director-General of the World Trade Organization (2005-2013). And he continues, “Who can do that better than Europe? We have a tradition of civilising, we *are* that tradition” (*NRC Handelsblad* March 25, 2017). Perhaps, and yes, it certainly is the task of politicians to capitalise upon this bend in the trend and the promises it entails, but a more important question is how to proceed from here? (For an account of the “standard of civilisation” in world politics, see Linklater 2016b).

From a global perspective, both the management of international affairs and the increasingly *public* operation of state institutions appear limited, because the differentiation of nation-state functions has stalled and the management of international affairs lags behind compared to the management of commercial and financial international affairs. There, differentiation and integration processes have achieved global dominance, a trend that was accompanied by integration conflicts and part-processes of disintegration, for example, when possibilities for organising labour unions were curbed before a critical degree of their acceptance and their formalisation was established, which resulted in an absence or stark reduction of unions and the exploitation of workers (see Wouters 2007, 221-5). The financial and economic crisis of 2007-9 is another manifestation of this type. At the same time, both examples exemplify the tensions and conflicts between the world of politicians and governments on the one hand, and the world of commerce, industry, and finance on the other, in which representatives of the latter have gained the upper hand. Their advanced level of integration has created favourable power chances for elites in the world of commerce and finance. These people have not experienced a loss of social functions nor a loss of their significance or influence. In fact, the opposite has occurred, and they clearly demonstrate this by flexing their muscles and displaying various forms of superiorism<sup>20</sup>: demanding and allowing each other extraordinarily large salaries, buying or bribing politicians, playing poor nation-states against each other, forcing international treaties and legal constructions to curb the power of entire states, evading taxes, and by absolving themselves of responsibility for the “externalities” of their activities. Together, these activities can be understood as indicating a reversal of democratisation, and a shift in the balance of power between the world of politics and the world of money in favour of the latter – in this specific sense, it is a de-democratisation or movement away from the legitimacy of elected officials.

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<sup>20</sup> The concept of “superiorism” brings all the ism’s such as racism, sexism, ageism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, and so on, onto a higher level of generalisation, highlighting their common characteristic: equating power superiority with superiority as a human being (see Wouters 2007, 219-20).

It seems likely that finance oligarchs have been able to get away with their excesses for such a long time because so many people have continued and still continue to identify with their success. They did so during the long period after decolonisation and pacification had turned large parts of the world into areas fit for economic enterprise: from the end of the 1970s to the crisis of 2008-9, which did not seem to change much. Differentiation and integration processes in the world of politics, whether national or international, continued to lag behind those in the world of finance and commerce.<sup>21</sup>

In the West, the damage caused by the crisis was less for those who “identified with the established,” whether in the world of politics or the world of money, compared to those who “identified with outsiders” (which was so prominent in the 1960s and 1970s). In prevailing manners and attitudes towards the lower classes and other groups of “outsiders” there was a shift in the carrot-and-stick balance towards more “stick” and less “carrot.” Marginalised groups were treated with less consideration and respect, and with stricter social control. Outsider groups such as children in residential care, for example, were met with “subsequent increases in formal social controls, punitive measures and populist support for further restraints,” which was “indicative of fears of a potential surge of new criminals, and crime being committed by the demarcated outsiders” (Vertigans 2015).<sup>22</sup>

In the near future, only small changes can be expected in the balance of power between established groups and outsider-groups (Elias and Scotson 2008), whether local, national, or global, and in business or in politics. An example of such a small change at the national level is drawn from the Netherlands, where a law was passed in 2013 to cap the salaries of senior people working in government services and semi-public organisations that are financed or subsidised by taxpayers. Since then, these salaries were prohibited by law to exceed the salary of a government minister. The motive behind the implementation of this law involved a scandal surrounding a large number of people in semi-public organisations earning more than the Prime Minister of the country. This clearly demonstrates how the standards from the world of commerce had deeply infiltrated and amalgamated with the world of politics. In less than 40 years since 1980, people in the world of politics and public services had appropriated some standards of the business world and lost some of the old-established pride of public servants, who would not even think of “stealing” tax-payers’ money by negotiating a salary well above their political “masters.” In the process they have created a considerable income disparity

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<sup>21</sup> The Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP), a treaty between the USA and the EU in the tradition of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT; 1946) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO; 1995), was criticised for promoting the interests of big corporations at the expense of EU democracies. Trump had other objections and the treaty is now shelved.

<sup>22</sup> <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0004.104>>.

between themselves and both politicians and the majority of civil servants whose terms and conditions have gradually been weakened.<sup>23</sup> The law limiting top salaries in the world of politics aimed to disentangle both standards. In March 2018, a bonus that increased a Dutch bank manager's salary by 50 per cent to over € 3 million was cancelled after loud public outcry: he got € 2 million instead.

Examples like these illustrate how people in business and finance were developing superiority feelings towards politicians and their voters. Under the pressure of this status competition, the money "superiors" were driven to become more unscrupulous and to grab what they can, while increasing numbers of politicians came to think they can rise to the same level of superiority by "stealing" tax-payers' money. Alarmed by the weakening ability of state politicians to curb TransNational Corporations (TNCs) excesses and by their inability to enlarge their grip on the control of global warming, civil groups and social movements have begun to organise international protests such as strikes and product boycotts. On a global scale, further public awareness was raised by subsequent financial crises such as the *Debt crisis*, the *Mexican pesos crisis* and the economic crisis of 2007-9, and by public scandals about tax evasion and money laundering such as the *Panama Papers* and the *Paradise Papers*. Crises and scandals formed the impetus for the development of the G7 into the G20, and of the FSF (Financial Stability Forum) into the FSB (Financial Stability Board; see Kirton 2016), while money-laundering operations such as "Troika Laundromat," involving Danske Bank, have pressured the European Banking Authority (EBA) and the FSB to promote further reform of international financial regulations. These and similar developments may gradually add up and become part of a more encompassing trend in the direction of greater public control over the private governance of capital via national laws and international regulations.

In many European nation-states, the privatisation of police tasks and services to ensure physical safety and property protection is a trend in a different yet related world, one that moves in a similar direction: under state supervision, protection is provided by (sometimes armed) personnel hired for a price. A large industry of security guards, security services, or protective services has been spreading since the 1980s, together with alarm systems and camera protection. With the spread of festivals, carnivals, pop concerts, football matches, and similar large events, the usual police protection and crowd-control came to be replaced or supplemented by private professionals, hired from private organisations – a trend in a direction that could be called "para-militarisation."

The USA has private standing "armies" working in their service, usually abroad, and here, because the monopolisation of the use of violence by the state

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<sup>23</sup> The business world probably served as a model because there, an income disparity between senior business executives and the workforce was growing in a similar manner.

has traditionally been less advanced than in European nation-states, hiring the services of armed personnel for guarding property and/or safeguarding people has been part of a longstanding tradition. The same goes for other countries with relatively lower levels of pacification and a protection industry functioning to guard the material and physical wellbeing of those with sufficient financial means but not enough political influence to warrant protection by the thinly spread state forces. In the USA as well as in Latin America and Africa, a lower level of pacification can be recognised, for instance, by a relatively large number of middle-class people living in gated and guarded communities and condominiums.

In Europe, particularly in its richer nation-states, the protection industry has been spreading at national levels, and here, this “para-militarisation” is theoretically and empirically significant not only for its demonstration of rising social controls on self-controls but also for a high and taken-for-granted level of pacification. Only where the abstinence from using violence for solving conflicts is to a large extent assumed can this regulated deregulation become possible. It is an informalisation of previous standards of formalisation, a controlled decontrolling of the state’s monopoly of violence.

Physical safety (from violence) is connected with material security (through money) in many ways. In countries where people have developed a high, taken-for-granted level of pacification, they have also developed a higher sensitivity to anything that threatens or is perceived to endanger their established level of physical safety and material security. Hence, they become increasingly sensitive to perceptions of risk that require privatised security measures. Except for those who can easily afford to buy private security, everyone is now caught in this upward spiral of para-militarisation, and they tend to feel increasingly threatened in maintaining their level of material security. Thus all the established people who (can) keep up with this type of competition become increasingly inclined to de-identify with individual members of outsider groups and to practice and support stricter external controls on these “losers.”

With these words I do not mean to suggest that I take one side or the other, the side of physical safety or material security. But they do help to make the theoretical and empirical points that a more substantial integration of both functions seems likely and that the governance of global issues and conflicts increasingly faces pressures toward expanding global governance – the theoretical point being that

new and higher-level survival-units will rise to the extent that growing interdependence between units at lower levels of integration makes them useful and necessary, replacing the increasingly notional sense of autarchy or self-sufficiency of individual nation-states. (Kuzmics et al., 2020, 15)

From a still wider perspective, the structure and force of these processes of differentiation, integration, and increasing complexity of social functions is strikingly similar to the processes of differentiation, integration, and increasing

complexity at the level of biological evolution, and the same conclusion is obvious from my essay on “Informalisation and Evolution: Four Phases in the Development of Steering Codes” (Wouters 2019b). It means that competition (pressuring towards differentiation) and co-operation (pressuring towards interweaving or integration) are operative as major driving forces of/in both biological and social processes.

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## 9. Where Are We Now?

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In their book, *Human Societies*, Lenski and Lenski write: “During the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, it seemed [...] that industrial societies would prove to be the least egalitarian of all” (1987, 313; also quoted in Wouters 1990). My study of trends and phases after the Anti-Colonial Revolution does not seem to justify a similarly forceful conclusion, but instead a more ambivalent one: on the one hand, a rise in global wealth and global income, and on the other, increasing inequality; the postcolonial world is becoming increasingly less egalitarian, that is, with income and wealth as criteria.

The *World Inequality Report 2018*<sup>24</sup> provides an extensive demonstration of this ambivalence, for example, in its “first estimates of how the growth in global income since 1980 has been distributed across the totality of the world population,” it reports: “The poorest half of the global population has seen its income grow significantly thanks to high growth in Asia. But the top 0.1% has captured as much growth as the bottom half of the world adult population since 1980” (wir, 40). Inequality in wealth and income has increased: “the global top 1 per cent of earners has captured twice as much of that growth as the 50 per cent of poorest individuals. The bottom 50 per cent has nevertheless enjoyed important growth rates” (ibid., 11). In 1990, 35 per cent of the world’s population—1.8 billion—lived in extreme poverty. Half were in East Asia and Pacific, where the extreme poverty rate was 60 per cent, making it the poorest region at that time. In 2013, an estimated 766 million people, or 10.7 per cent of the world’s population, lived in extreme poverty, and Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for half the world’s extreme poor.<sup>25</sup>

It is hard to compare, on the one hand, the balancing of constructive and destructive forces that accompanied global integration and disintegration in the decades in and after the Industrial Revolution, and on the other, the balancing of these forces after the post-colonial era of globalisation. In both periods, however, early integration processes lagged behind differentiation processes

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<sup>24</sup> <<http://wir2018.wid.world/>>.

<sup>25</sup> <<http://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgatlas/SDG-01-no-poverty.html>>.

and were accompanied by many integration conflicts and part-processes of disintegration.

With income and wealth as criteria, however, the question of whether functional democratisation will continue must remain inconclusive and ambivalent. In my account of changes in global balances of constructive and destructive forces,<sup>26</sup> the criteria of (in)equality in income and wealth have been supplemented with criteria such as human dignity and human value, and with others like the balances of power and dependence, of competition and cooperation, and of functional democratisation and informalisation. My account highlights integration processes on the one hand, and integration conflicts and disintegration on the other. From a global perspective, the processes of globalisation, civilisation, functional democratisation, and informalisation seem to have developed further in the same direction. The overall trends of competition and interweaving, and of differentiation and integration of social functions, have not stalled or changed direction, nor has a change occurred in the rise of growth rates of income and wealth among the world's population.

Both integration and disintegration processes are obvious in the European Union. For the moment, the Brits may dream of splendid isolation. They have left the EU, whatever that means, but together with the “America First” policy and the trade war between the USA and China, the Brexit Saga has put increasingly strong pressures on its people and states to develop in the direction of further integration. A recent indication of this is the decision that the European Commission will include a commissioner for Defence and Industrial Politics. It shows that “European sovereignty” is becoming more viable as an argument, and that a European Ministry of Foreign Affairs is slowly developing. The European Council on Foreign Relations report that European voters “want to see the European Union come of age as a geopolitical actor and chart its own course.” Most EU citizens believe that they are living in an EU in which they can no longer rely on the US security guarantee, and that “there is a growing case for a more coherent and effective EU foreign policy in a dangerous, competitive world” (Dennison 2019). It seems probable that, once outside the EU, the British dream of splendid isolation will conflict with the dream of a Global Britain and that both dreams will disappear in the face of the same “dangerous, competitive world” as the EU sees itself confronted with.

In addition to disintegration and integration conflicts, the postcolonial era saw a new destructive force on a global level. Increasingly, clear indications emerged that humanity was endangering its own “environment” and life on

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<sup>26</sup> Hans-Peter Waldhoff understands the tension between constructive and destructive forces to make up a central balance in the theory of civilising processes, and he states that his own study of *Eros und Thanatos* has its main focus on the balance between these forces, and how they are represented in the universe of symbols and function as part of them (2019, 29).

earth. The danger implies that humans are losing control over “nature” and “natural” processes, thus putting enormous additional demands on their levels of social control and self-control. They are also enormous, because they include demands of a political nature that must be met and implemented on a global level of integration of nation-states, a level that barely exists and is under (America-First) attack.

At present, the differentiation and integration of functions are more advanced in the world of commerce and finance than in the world of politics, where the integration of functions – the functions of nation-states in particular – seems to have proceeded at a slower pace. After reminding us that “it was not until the 1980s that state controls of capital movements were withdrawn” and how this resulted in “a revitalisation of British and US financial aristocracies with all the critical consequences of the current crisis,” sociologist Reinhard Blomert provides a preview of the future. He writes: “We may expect that the pendulum will swing to the other side, with politicians again able and competent to tame the financial aristocracy by regulating investment streams, and by reducing the mobility of capital and the opportunities for the creation of future bubbles” (2012) – and, in addition, by making them pay their taxes.

Among other things, this will depend on the pace and extent to which people and politicians develop more of a global identification, prompting impulses toward social integration to gain in pace and catch up with processes of specialisation or differentiation in all social activities. It also depends on whether, should integration conflicts intensify, and awareness of global dangers rise, more people will come to trust politicians over commercial people and finance oligarchs. They might, because “the people” may have a little control over politicians but their ability to control the moneycrats is far more limited. Moreover, politicians in nation-states, particularly in parliamentary democracies, are structurally obliged to be far more reliable and systematic in providing social protection via welfare-state arrangements than the alms and charity of the superrich can ever be. The same goes for stimulating and organising the rise in social control and self-control needed to stop the dangers of humanity losing control over destructive “natural” processes. Among politicians as well as among “the people,” this function to provide both types of social protection presently seems a rather underestimated source of power, also as a potential crowbar to cut across national party lines and get to the level of international political relations. Even before these opportunities, dangers and conflicts rise to the political surface, sooner or later the necessity of coordinating the institutional, national, and international multipolarity and reciprocal control among various groups of people will exert more and more pressure in the direction of further political integration. This necessity will rise as national and international interdependency networks rise to a critical level of differentiation, integration and complexity. Research, recently published in a special issue of this journal, “Emotions, Authority, and National Character: Historical-Processual



Perspectives,” attests to such a rise. Covering an area comprising Western, East Central, and South-eastern European countries, the Middle East, the USA, and Japan, the editors present as a major conclusion:

Taken as a whole, our contributions attest to the development of greater European, or even global, webs of entanglement between nations-states, national we-images, and national identities, which serve to demonstrate [...] a global process of functional democratisation that might one day come to restrict the power of its contemporary hegemon and its habitus of superiority. (Kuzmics et al., 2020, 37)

The future of informalisation also depends, at least in part, on whether further globalisation brings the more egalitarian relations of further functional democratisation, because decreasing authoritarian relationships are important for social and psychic informalisation to flourish. However, in the relatively rich parts of the world, processes of informalisation are likely to continue their development in any case. We should expect integration conflicts and disintegration processes, but if humanity does not destroy itself, or if it is not destroyed entirely or in part by non-human intra- or extra-terrestrial catastrophes, we can expect the processes of globalisation, civilisation, functional democratisation, and informalisation to develop further in the same direction. In other words, the direction of civilising processes has continued.

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